

COMMONWEALTH SCHOOL

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WILLIAM D. WHARTON
HEADMASTER

August 23, 2000

Dear returning students,

The beginning of the year approaches, and I trust that you are making the most of the last few weeks to finish summer reading, review your Spanish, French, or Latin, and make sure you're all caught up on sleep.

I'm now moved into the big office and am settling into the new job. I've been talking with your teachers over the summer about, among other things, their thoughts on the kind of school Commonwealth is, what we must preserve, and what we should think about changing. I'm also interested in hearing your thoughts on these matters, and hope that the coming year will afford chances for some of us to sit down and talk one-on-one. But I also very much hope that many of you will be able to attend the student and student-faculty meetings for returning students, at which we will be able to discuss specific concerns you have, as well as some more general questions.

The meetings will take place on Tuesday, September 5. At 10:00 a.m. you can meet among yourselves in room 2C. You may find it helpful to choose a facilitator or facilitators to lead your discussion and the afternoon conversation with the faculty. In the morning you can discuss what you want to say and put together an agenda for the afternoon meeting, which will begin at 1:30 in the library. If you want to eat in school bring a box lunch; we'll supply milk.

You probably have some specific concerns, but I'd like to put forth a few questions for you to consider. I found these in a letter that Charles Merrill sent to students in August of 1966 in preparation for that year's student-faculty discussion. They're good questions, so I decided to pose them again, with a few adaptations.

1. Do you feel challenged and stimulated by the courses and requirements at Commonwealth? How important are the choices available to you?
2. Is sufficient stimulus given to imagination, initiative, independence in your academic work?
3. How could efficiency of study and teaching be improved? Is sufficient extra help available?
4. Do you consider Commonwealth a morally straightforward community, in the way students and teachers act toward the school and each other? How could this be improved?
5. What can we do to live comfortably, or at least civilly, with 141 students in the building. (We've made some adjustments, but welcome ideas.)
6. Do you have ideas about arts? sports? extra-curricular activities? Hancock? What can we do to make what we offer better? How can we encourage all students to participate fully in these areas?
7. Are there good channels of communication between students and faculty? What could be done to improve opportunities for leadership and responsibility?
8. What do you consider the major challenge facing Commonwealth this year?

I don't expect a list of answers, but hope the questions will provoke thoughtful discussion.

You'll find some changes in the building when you return. The Dartmouth Lobby will be rearranged, with the copier over by room 1A and new benches in the nook it used to occupy. New benches will also grace the nook near room 3E. We have 140 new cubbies—most on the third floor, a few replacing the closet between the couches in the Dartmouth Lobby—and what used to be the dance studio is now room 5A (dancers will practice at the Boston Center for Adult Education's studio on Arlington street). We've put in new doors to the first-floor bio/chem office and what used

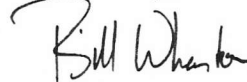
to be Ms. DelTredici's office on the third floor, which Mr. Racioppi will now inhabit.

In addition to thirty-five new students we will have six new teachers joining us in September. Make a point in the first weeks of school of saying hello and introducing yourselves to those you don't know. Lunch is a great time to get to know the new people here.

Speaking of lunch, I will close by requesting that you try to eat lunch at school. If you go out, keep it to once a week. There are a number of good reasons, social and economic, for doing so that I would be happy to discuss. Whether you go out for lunch or eat at school, be sure to show up for announcements. We have to have ways to get messages out to everyone, and it's much easier and more pleasant to do so face to face. In my public school we had in each classroom squawk boxes out of which announcements and the pledge of allegiance (led by a specially chosen student) would blare first thing each morning. Show up for announcements and I won't be tempted to recreate my childhood experience.

I look forward to seeing you soon. If you need or want to get in touch before then, please call me at school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Whelan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "B".